

INTRODUCTION

This interagency report will summarize wildland fire activities in the Southwest Area during 2002. It is broken down into the following sections:

I. Highlights

II. Fire Season Statistics

III. Incident Support Summary

Section I

AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS



**USDA FOREST SERVICE
REGION 3
SOUTHWESTERN REGION**



The 2002 wildland fire season in the Southwest was a record setter for many reasons. It was the first season for the new Predictive Service Unit in the Southwest Coordination Center. The predictions from the group early in December was for a less than normal snow pack and continuation of the drought that could rival the record drought of the 1950's. Based upon these predictions, we began a strategy of preparedness expecting a severe wildfire season in the National Forests.

The fire season started in early January on the southern Forests with scattered human caused incidents leading to the first large incident March 1 on the Coronado National Forest. After that, the season continued to rapidly develop with the spring wind season in late April and into May, extreme dryness continued into June and July with lightning season. Fortunately, we did not experience major episodes of dry lightning. The amount we did experience proved challenging as many fires were initiated during each episode. The Region survived with 32 Type I and Type II Team assignments on National Forests through September 1.

The Region could not have made it through the season without the help we received from outside the region from detailers, AD's, and contractors. These folks helped us with developing a strategy, assessing the wildfire potential, filling in critical positions, and conducting reviews.

The most impressive statistic for the season was getting through the season without serious aviation accidents or injuries. We did, however, have some ground accidents that could have been much more serious. For example, a bus accident that occurred within the Region could easily have been a potentially very serious incident. Early in the season we did experience some Work Capacity Fitness Test related injuries. The Region also experienced a fatality in a non-fire related Engine accident after the season.

The year brought many more changes in personnel within the Region. Mark Johnson became the Fire Staff Officer on the Prescott National Forest. Paul Boucher became the Forest Fire Management Officer on the Gila National Forest. Bruce Greco became the Fire Staff Officer on the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests. Ron Moody retired as the Regional Fuels Specialist. Bob Leaverton, Deputy Director, spent most of the year in the Washington Office on detail, and then accepted a Forest Supervisor position in Region 2. Rick Black came to the Southwest Coordination Center from the Southern Coordination Center. John Schulte, SWCC Director, accepted a position in

the Washington Office after a long-term detail in the position. Emily Irwin accepted the FUTA Coordinator position. Jami Anzalone joined the Aviation program in a developmental position in the Regional Office.

Bette Telles joined the Regional Office in a shared Washington Office position in Human Rights and Civil Rights. Cathy Sanchez accepted a position in Support Services at FUTA. Rance Irwin accepted a Fixed Wing Aviation position in the Regional Office. Kathy Allred accepted a position as National Lead for Air Tanker program at NIFC.

Bill Waterbury
Assistant Director, Operations
Aviation and Fire Management

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
NEW MEXICO STATE OFFICE
FIRE AND AVIATION GROUP**



Like almost everyone else in the Southwest, BLM New Mexico had a very active fire season in 2002. Both the number of fires (266) and the acreage burned (46,000) were way above average, but we managed to handle that without any serious injuries or significant problems. One of the greatest accomplishments in the Southwest during the 2002 season was the outstanding safety record for all agencies.

Another accomplishment that BLM New Mexico is proud of is, in spite of the unprecedented high level of fire activity and danger, we still managed to complete fuels and prescribed fire projects totaling nearly 50,000 acres. We will continue to work hard on our goals of reducing the threat of fire to communities, reducing fuel loads, and restoring fire to the ecosystem while remaining fully committed to providing safe and effective fire suppression and protection.

We continued to augment our fire suppression and fuels management capability under the National Fire Plan. Our radio system received some much-needed upgrading and improvement. BLM NM also passed \$450,000 directly to rural and volunteer fire departments to increase their wildfire suppression capability by providing equipment and training. Along with the other agencies, BLM New Mexico sent people and equipment to other states to help out after our fire season moderated.

There were a number of changes in the fire program staffs this year. Steve Bumgarner came to work in the Las Cruces field office as the FMO. Roger Onstadt, the Prescribed Fire/Fuels specialist in Socorro, and Brian Watts, the Prescribed Fire/Fuels specialist for the Farmington field office both took position in other states. Charlie Luevano, the former Roswell AFMO, took a position as the BLM training specialist assigned to the Fire Use Training Academy in Albuquerque. Brian Lee, the BLM NM SWCC Coordinator, retired. Lisa Bye is the new Smoke Management Specialist, a position shared with the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

In 2003, BLM New Mexico will strive for another safe and effective season for our suppression forces. We will focus on improving and enhancing our community protection programs and enhancing our ecosystem restoration projects, especially by building upon partnerships with communities and other agencies.

**Bob Lee
State Fire Management Officer**

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE INTERMOUNTAIN REGION SOUTHWESTERN PARKS



The level of activity the Intermountain Region experienced during 2002 was unprecedented. Significant workload was associated with Program Management, Preparedness, Fuels, Wildland Fire Activity, Fire Ecology and Aviation. During the peak of activity, all four geographic area MAC groups that the IMR coordinates with, were functional and required substantial participation by agency representatives.

Program Management

The Long Mesa Fire Review was conducted October 22-24, 2002. This review resulted in the recognition of NPS and local fire department employees for their over-the-top level of performance that saved most of Mesa Verde National Park's infrastructure.

Personnel changes within the Branch of Fire and Aviation included moving Eva Long out of the regional compliance staff to the Branch of Fire and Aviation and replacing her with a second position that was converted from contracting. This was done in response to a shift in program workload.

The Intermountain Region fielded a Fire and Aviation Safety Team to visit five parks during this fire season to evaluate how parks were complying with work/rest guidelines and fatigue management, readiness, initial attack effectiveness and staffing, severity funding expenditure, qualifications, readiness review deficiency corrections and support to area parks. The findings of the FAS Team were essentially that the reviewed parks were doing everything that they could give the level of funding and staffing they received. The most significant finding that the team identified is that the Area FMO concept is not working. There is too much non-discretionary work to do at area parks for current staffing to manage.

During the week of January 28, 2002, a program review team consisting of park, regional, and national office staff was assembled to evaluate and review all fiscal documentation, fire occurrence reporting, planning and implementation of the fire management program at Big Thicket National Preserve. Specific areas covered during the review included Fiscal Audit, Science and Ecology, resource management plans, fuels management, fire ecology, fire effects, readiness reviews, operations, facilities and aviation.

Findings and recommendations were made on the above program areas and were forwarded to the park for actions and or corrections. A one-year check on the progress of the review will be conducted in September of 2003.

Aviation

Over 4,000 hours of flight time were recorded within the region with over 1200 hours in direct support of wildland fire activities. There were no accidents within the region. SAFECOM submissions were up as a result of improved employee training and an increase in the number of flight hours/exposure. As in previous years, personal protection equipment violations were the number one issue reported.

The Mesa Verde helicopter program successfully converted from fleet owned to a contract helicopter, staffed by a standard helitack module, flying over 300 hours of support to interagency fire activities. The Zion fairshare helitack module moved into new facilities jointly operated with BLM and now have a permanent home. Regional office staff was active in several aviation related fire assignments and were instrumental in developing the first FAST criteria and coordination in Region 2.

Regional aviation program reviews were conducted at Saguaro, Glacier, Carlsbad Caverns, Curecanti/Black Canyon, and Big Thicket. Additionally, all other significant aviation facilities within the region were successfully self inspected under the region's new aviation facility review program. Six employees received Airwards under the region's newly adopted recognition program and two employees received Department valor awards for their actions in a helicopter crash on an eastern fire.

Fuels

In 2002, lack of burn windows resulting from widespread drought, and delays in project compliance which precluded parks from accomplishing planned projects and reaching their targets. Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado all experienced exceptionally active fire seasons. Within most of the Region, fire restrictions were in place by April, so most parks did not have a spring burning season. The drought, which began in fall 2001 did not abate until fall 2002.

Target for the Region during 2002 was 49,698 acres. Parks within IMR have reported 18,750 acres treated in 2002; 6,689 acres in the Wildland-Urban Interface and 12,061 acres outside WUI. Key park program contributors were Big Thicket, Bryce Canyon, Chickasaw, Chiracahua, Grand Canyon, Grand Teton, Lake Meredith, Saguaro, and Zion. Some adjustments were made to targets as FY-02 wrapped up. IMR has approximately 22,000 acres being carried forward into 2003 that are part of the target, in addition to new activities initiated and funded in 2003.

IMR parks were involved in the national implementation of Fastracks as a data management system for the fuels program in 2002, replacing SACS. Implementation of this system mid-course during a very active fire season was difficult. Internet-based training sessions were well attended; feedback on project development and input to reinforce the training was lacking and has contributed to continuing problems attaining clean data. Further

development of fuels business rules and standard practices, accompanied by user handbooks and better quality training will assist. Further Fastracks or NFPORS implementation should take advantage of lessons learned in 2002. Development of Regional verification and approval modules for those systems is critical to success.

Fire Use Modules

The four Intermountain Region Fire Use Modules were activated for a longer season in 2002, starting earlier and ending later. Modules were less involved in WFU, and more active in suppression assignments, reflecting the intensity of the fire season. Collectively, 72 days were spent on WFU's, compared to 188 days in 2001. WFU assignments were with the Bridger-Teton, Wasatch-Cache, and White River National Forests and Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Zion National Parks. BAND did not get a WFU assignment this year. 180 days were spent in IA/suppression assignments, compared with 2 days in 2001. The BAND module led a type 2 crew and other modules formed up a type II crew during July. Time involved in prescribed fires and preparation remained stable, 228 days compared to 246 in 2002; however, less of this was accomplished within region than in the past and thus more time was spent traveling, over 25,000 miles for each module. IMR Modules assisted the Midwest Region in April for 66 days of prescribed fire assignments in North and South Dakota, Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Wyoming and the Pacific West Region at Lava Beds and Lassen for 36 days. Assistance within IMR was provided at Lake Meredith, Bryce Canyon, Dinosaur, Cedar Breaks, Glacier, Grand Teton, Saguaro, and Zion. Modules were mobilized to Big Thicket in fall 2002, but flooding rains prevented implementation.

Wildland Fire Activity

Incident Management Teams were assigned to wildland fires occurring at Yellowstone and Mesa Verde National Parks, Dinosaur and El Malpais National Monuments. Glacier, Yellowstone and El Malpais also implemented wildland fire use plans.

Preparedness

The Intermountain Region expended over **\$2.4 Million in severity funding** to support local, zone and geographic area extended staffing needs. Resources utilized to meet extended staffing included extending exclusive use helicopters and modules, pre-positioning type 2 crews and engine companies.

All Firepro Parks within the Intermountain Region received readiness reviews this year. Most were local, however, ZION, DINO and GRTE received a Cluster or Regional Review.

Fire Effects Monitoring

Intermountain Region fire ecologists and fire effects personnel actively participated in developing business needs for new software. This region is eagerly anticipating the new software because this application will provide

long-needed data storage and analysis capabilities for all IMR programs, including those parks with non-traditional fire effects monitoring protocols.

Participated in developing analysis logic for fire effects monitoring that will generate staffing and support, through the Firepro Steering Committee.

IMR provided instructors for both national RX-80 classes taught at Yosemite and Gulf Islands.

Park fire ecologists at BAND, GRCA, SAGU, and ZION are working on combining monitoring data to present fire effects information on southwest ponderosa pine to regional FMO's.

Working on developing regional protocols for mechanical treatment monitoring and for fuels data collection protocols during vegetation mapping projects.

Made a presentation to the Intermountain Region Inventory and Monitoring network managers on fire effects monitoring protocols; and provided individual park monitoring plot information to national coordinator for the Inventory and Monitoring program.

Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation

The Intermountain Region put together a small team of people to assist in the development of a rehabilitation plan for the Long Mesa Fire at Mesa Verde.

The region also provided assistance in obtaining rehabilitation funding for Wupatki National Monument following the Antelope Fire.

Thirteen individuals from the region attended the BAER training held in Reno, Nevada. The region also participated in the Colorado Rehabilitation Task Force following wildland fires in Colorado.

Planning and Consultation

Ongoing efforts to write fire management plans and associated compliance documents showed an increasing need for fire ecology expertise. Dave McHugh at Big Thicket was generous with providing Fulton Jeansonne's assistance to Mesa Verde during their planning and compliance efforts involving fuels treatments and fire planning. John Morelock was also very generous by loaning Richard Gatewood for planning efforts at southern Arizona parks, development of the new fire effects software, and serving as a BAER Team Leader at Mesa Verde.

During 2002, two Fire Management Plans were completed within the Intermountain Region by WABA, and FLFO. In addition, 29 Fire Management Plans were started or continued during 2002. This leaves the Intermountain Region with 14 operational Fire Management Plans that are fully compliant

with 1995 and 2001 Wildland Fire Management Policy. Nine other plans will become fully compliant when their annual updates are completed

The region has spent many hours working on fire and resource management training with the Natural Resource Program Center and the Intermountain Region resource staff. This training includes Section 7 consultation with FWS, and developing basic ecological models to derive desired condition for vegetation management.

Many thanks to Jim Kitchen and Fulton Jeansonne for participating in the Fire and Ecosystem Processes class, at Albright this spring. We would also thank Tony Caprio from Pacific West Region for his presentation during this class.

Support to National Training

IMR employees participated in teaching S-590, S-580; and S-520 at NARTC, Cultural Resource Protection sponsored by Harper's Ferry Training Center, and Fire and Ecosystem Processes at the Albright Training Center.

Research

The National Park Service fire research program provided first year funding for a fire research study at Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

The region is working on other research proposals that will be submitted for Joint Fire Science funding consideration.

Other

Intermountain Region and Bandelier National Park are happy to be sponsoring a master's degree candidate at Colorado State University, Laura Trader.

Bryan Swift
Regional Fire Management Officer

**U. S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE
REGION 2
SOUTHWEST REGION**



The 2002 fire season in Region 2 started early in the Southwest with large fires beginning in early February and continuing through September. Arizona and New Mexico Fish and Wildlife Service employees assisted other agencies on wildfire assignments for a total of 659 days while responding to 44 fires on Refuge and adjacent lands which burned over 8,000 acres.

The first severity requests for the Region were submitted in March for the Refuges in Southeastern Arizona and New Mexico, these severity requests were extended through mid July. Both engines and additional management staff were detailed in to cover critical staffing shortages and provide additional suppression support as fires were quickly exceeding the capabilities of initial attack resources. In July the last severity request was made for the Lower Colorado River Refuges in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Initial attack on the three agencies jurisdictions was exceeding local capabilities and additional engine crews, dispatchers, and management staff was needed to provide 7-day initial attack along the Colorado River.

The Fish and Wildlife Service had 21 wildfires fires in Arizona and 23 in New Mexico. The largest fires on Arizona and New Mexico Fish and Wildlife Service lands were the 1,117 acre Center fire and 5,300 acre City Hall fire on Buenos Aires, NWR and the 424 acre Hippy fire on the Cibola NWR.

Although prescribed burning was set back on Refuge lands due to the severe wildfire activity and the extended drought in 2002. Refuges in Arizona and New Mexico were still able to completed 52 prescribed burn and mechanical thinning projects for 14,077 acres.

Regional fire management staffing changes included the addition of Lorene Guffey, WUI Coordinator, Tricia Roller, Prescribed Fire Specialist, and Kim Osborn, Training Assistant FUTA/Dispatcher SWCC to the Regional office staff. Refuges saw the addition of Mike Davis, FMO, John Thornburg, AFMO and Don Kearney, Prescribed Fire Specialist to New Mexico and Chris Wilcox, AFMO in Arizona at Buenos Aires NWR.

Jeff Whitney
Regional Fire Management Coordinator